

- Hall and NY Delegation Support Spitzer's Efforts to Cover More NY Children -

Washington, DC - U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) announced his support for Governor Eliot Spitzer's campaign to roll back the Bush Administration's ruling that blocks a bi-partisan effort to provide affordable health insurance to New York children.

"The Bush Administration's decision to deny New York's plan to provide insurance for more uninsured children is another example of how out of touch the President is with the needs of the American people," said Hall. "Providing our children with healthcare is protecting America's future. It is difficult to imagine that President Bush and his Administration want to stop New York from protecting the health of its children, but this decision suggests they are. This decision cannot stand and I'm committed to working with my colleagues in Congress to do everything possible to overturn the Administration's misguided decision."

Last month, new federal rules were announced governing the expansion of state plans under the federal State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The rules blocked New York's legislatively approved expansion of children's health insurance, as well as expansions or pending plans in 17 other states and the District of Columbia. The federal decision was based on arbitrary rules that are not supported by the statute that established SCHIP and defies Congressional intent.

Last week the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Service (CMS) rejected New York's request to expand its eligibility for SCHIP, known in New York as Child Health Plus. Under the New York plan approved earlier this year, approximately 70,000 children in families earning up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level would be provided access to health insurance.

Hall and the rest of New York State's Congressional delegation have sent a letter asking CMS to rescind the requirements imposed on states wishing to extend health insurance to moderate-income families.

The grounds for denial of New York's request were based on new rules announced on August 17 by the federal CMS that apply to all states. They are:

- New York could not prove that 95 percent of children below 200 percent of the poverty level were enrolled in Child Health Plus. New York has one of the highest participation rates – at 88 percent. No state has reached a 95 percent enrollment rate;
- New York's plan did not require a child to go without health insurance for 12 months – with no exceptions – before becoming eligible for Child Health Plus. New York's plan to require a six month "crowd out" period, with exceptions, is similar to plans in many other states that have received federal approval for expansions above 200 percent of the federal poverty level; and
- New York's co-premium requirements were too low because they were not comparable to the private sector or as high as five percent of family income. New York's co-premium requirements are comparable to amounts set by other states and previously approved by CMS.

With the SCHIP expansion, virtually all children in New York State would have access to

affordable health insurance through a combination of Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and private insurance. The initiative is a key piece of Governor Spitzer's patient-first health care reform agenda and is one of the first steps in the Governor's "Partnership for Coverage" initiative to expand access to health insurance for all New Yorkers through an incremental, building block approach.

-30-